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Submitted electronically to LABTestimony@cga.ct.gov

Re: Testimony supporting S.B. 1178: *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days*

Dear Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

Family Values @ Work appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of S.B. 1178: An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days.

Family Values @ Work (FV@W) grew out of the recognition that valuing caregiving and enabling people to be good providers and good family members is key to achieving racial, gender and economic equity. FV@W supports grassroots organizations in 27 states, including Connecticut, as a recognized leader with significant experience fostering grassroots coalitions and policy change in a geographically diverse set of locations. FV@W and our network has shaped the debates around Earned Sick and Safe Days (ESSD) and Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML), engaged a wide range of partners, and guided development of the most inclusive policies to date.

In 2011, Connecticut became the first state (other than Washington, DC) to pass a paid sick days law. However, this law excluded many workers, including those most in need of paid sick days. Workers in businesses with fewer than 50 employees, those employed in certain types of organizations, and temporary and day laborers were all exempted from the initial policy. Even when workers qualified, many members of their family did not meet the standard set to provide care.

As an organization and a movement, we recognize that time to care is a jobs issue, as well as a key to economic self-sufficiency and to well-being for children, families and seniors. The changes proposed in S.B. 1178 will ensure that even more workers have access to time to care for themselves and their loved ones.

Specifically, Family Values @ Work supports language in S.B. 1178 that:

- Opens paid sick days to workers in all business sizes, not just large businesses of 50 or more. Best practice in paid sick and safe days law includes covering all workers. Unlike the existing law or H.B. 6668, S.B. 1178 follows that best practice.
- Extends caregiving to all family members, not just children under 18 and spouses. By matching the Connecticut paid leave family definition, this bill reduces confusion for workers and employers. It also recognizes that the "nuclear family" model of a married husband, wife, and their kids no longer applies to every family. An inclusive paid sick days policy that allows time

to care for extended family and loved ones who don't share biological or legal ties is critical to the health, wellbeing, and economic security of Connecticut workers. Limiting the description of family would put Connecticut out of step with other paid sick days leaders and with other laws in the state.

- Expands the time available from 40 hours to 80 hours and removes the waiting period to use the time. As we've seen during the COVID pandemic, illness doesn't wait for someone to be on the job a certain amount of time. Allowing for use as soon as time is accrued protects workers, businesses, and public health, as does increasing the total number of hours available. Whether dealing with COVID, routine doctor's appointments, caregiving, or so much more, workers need more time to care, and the proposed law reflects that need.
- Increases the accrual rate and allows workers to receive sick time up front and to carry it over. These changes give workers quicker access to leave while providing more flexibility and options to employers.
- Confirms that employees do not need to find replacement workers. When workers are ill or need to provide care, that time shouldn't be dependent on finding a replacement.
- Includes public health emergencies and safe days. This coverage brings Connecticut's law in line with other paid sick days legislation and ensures that residents don't need to wait for federal action to take time in a public health emergency. As part of the safe days language, we especially want to highlight the need for self-attestation to count as documentation.

Too many Connecticut workers have not had access to a single sick day throughout the COVID pandemic due to exemptions from the state's law or from the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The workers least likely to have access to paid sick days are those on the frontlines of this pandemic, including the women and people of color who make up the majority of domestic workers and essential workers.

When workers without paid sick days face illness, they must choose between caring for themselves and those they love or keeping their job. The decision they make ripples out beyond any one person or family, especially in a pandemic. Pressuring employees to work through illnesses without adequate time to recover causes productivity losses for businesses¹ and health consequences for workers.² Conversely, access to paid sick days during the pandemic flattened the curve of COVID-19 transmissions and reduced COVID-19 cases in certain areas by 400 cases per day.³ Access to paid sick days remains a top challenge in receiving the COVID vaccine - ensuring all CT workers have access to paid sick days would greatly help workers receive the vaccine and have time to recover.

¹ Zoe Ziliak Michel, The Business Benefits of Paid Sick Days in Maryland (Jan. 13, 2017). Available at: <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/04/The-Business-Benefits-of-Paid-Sick-Days-in-Maryland-final.pdf>.

² Dana Wilkie, 9 in 10 Workers Admit Going to Work Sick (Nov. 7, 2019). Available at: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/coming-to-work-sick-.aspx>.

³ Stefan Pichler, Katherine Wen, and Nicolas R. Ziebarth, COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Has Helped Flatten The Curve In The United States (October 15, 2020). Available at <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/abs/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863>

Connecticut's original paid sick days law left far too many Connecticut workers without access to paid sick time. In the ten years since Connecticut's law passed, nearly 20 million workers across the country gained access to paid sick and safe days to care for themselves and those they love.

We greatly appreciate the state's willingness to update the paid sick days law to benefit more workers and businesses. We hope the Committee and all lawmakers will vote favorably this year to strengthen Connecticut's paid sick days law, and we stand ready to answer additional questions or help in any way that we can.

I hope to present this testimony via Zoom on March 9, 2023. However, I will also be taking some paid sick time on the same day to meet with my oncologist. As a woman with Stage IV breast cancer (thankfully with no current evidence of disease) who has also been recovering from two broken bones this year, my family and I have firsthand experience with the need to care and be cared for. I am lucky enough to have the time I need, and I applaud Connecticut for taking steps to ensure all workers have access to paid sick and safe days as well.

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